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FERDINAND OF BULGARIA

THE STORM CENTRE OF THE BALKANS

From A. G. Gardiner's "The War Lords" (J. M. Dent and Sons, 1/6) a collection of excellent character sketches of the men most prominent in this war.

This, of course, was written before Bulgaria had joined the Germans.

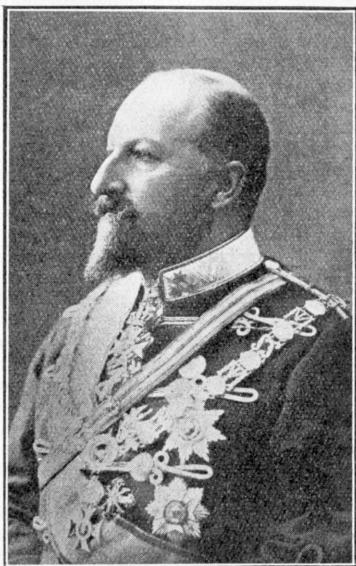
NOT the least of the advantages with which the Kaiser began the war were the sympathies of those who occupied the thrones of the outlying and secondary powers. Germany, with its prolific growth of royal houses, has always done a large export trade in royalties. Whenever a throne was vacant or a new throne was established, it was to Germany that the people in search of a king naturally went to market, and it was not often that they failed to find the article they required. The result has been profitable to the Kaiser. The bread cast upon the waters has come back in many days, "and buttered tu, for sartin," as Mr. Biglow would say. North and south there was the same phenomenon—the royal house in sympathy with Germany, the people in sympathy with the Allies. It is a fact which deserves to be carefully remembered by the democracy in all countries, for it has an important bearing on the part which the monarchical idea plays in the affairs of nations. In Greece the king has the Kaiser's sister for his wife; in Roumania the throne is occupied by a Hohenzollern; in Sweden the king is connected with Germany by marriage; in Bulgaria the king is a Coburg-Orleanist. And no one, surveying the history of the war, can doubt how power-

ful has been that Germanic influence in the palaces in checking the popular sympathies of these countries.

But it is Ferdinand whose influence on events has been most subtle and most power-

ful hand seems the perfectly fitting destiny of Ferdinand, for he is the king of melodrama. Those people who suppose that melodrama is not true to life have not studied his story or his character. Both are transpontine. He is the very stuff of which the dreams of the playwright and the romancist are compact. There are times indeed when you almost doubt whether he was not invented by Dumas or Stevenson or Anthony Hope: you seem to see the movement of the wires and the face of the author between the wings enjoying the success of his triumphant creation. When the curtain goes down the author will surely appear and thank you for your kind reception of the child of his invention.

As a matter of fact King Ferdinand was invented by his mother. It used to be said that Princess Clementine was the cleverest woman in Europe. This only meant that she was a very skilful and ambitious intriguer. The daughter of King Louis Philippe and the widow of Prince Augustus of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, she felt that her youngest and favorite child had a special claim upon Providence. She resolved that he should be a king by hook or by crook. Moreover, she had the assurance of a gipsy that he was



FERDINAND, KING OF BULGARIA.

"I am like a blind man, running with a lighted torch among haystacks. Whichever side I turn I must set fire to something."

ful. And as a preliminary to understanding why Bulgaria—which owes its freedom to Russia, which for centuries has been engaged in a fierce struggle with the Turk, which reverences the name of Gladstone more than that of any statesman, and which has always looked to England as its political champion—is in this supreme crisis found preserving a morose aloofness from the cause of the Allies, it is necessary to understand King Ferdinand.

In a house in Sofia, I have been told, there is a dead hand, preserved not as a relic but as a reminder. The house is the old home of the murdered Stambuloff, the hand is the hand of that rough-hewn patriot himself. One day the hand is to be buried. The day will be that on which Stambuloff's murder is avenged. It is an uncomfortable reflection for King Ferdinand.

And yet to live under the shadow of a



CONSTANTINE I, KING OF GREECE.



PETER I, KING OF SERBIA.



TAKE JONESCO.
Leader of the Pro-Allies Party in Roumania.

destined like Macbeth for a throne, and Princess Clementine was not a person to bandy words with a gipsy. She took the practical course, and prepared her son, from the cradle, for the career marked out for him. He was whisked from capital to capital, habituated to the company of princes, indoctrinated with the diplomatic subtleties of "The Prince," taught the facile graces of the *charmeur*, made to cultivate entomology as one of those hobbies that sit so prettily on potentates, coached in half a dozen languages, even in Hungarian, for one never knew from whence the call to kingship would come. Thrones might spring up or fall vacant anywhere. One must be ready to pounce. It is a beautiful idyll of maternal love—a modern inversion of the legend of the Roman matron who sacrificed her children to the State.

No prince ever entered upon a more precarious enterprise than his. Unrecognised by the Powers without, faced by a masterful minister within, he seemed the princeling of an hour—a momentary incident in Bulgaria's troubled story. And yet at the end of twenty-five years his throne was secure, his country stable and prosperous, he was smiled on by the Powers, his principality has become a kingship, he stood at the head of a triumphant army with the Turk under foot, and it seemed that he might emerge from the war the Emperor of the Balkans as the King of Prussia emerged from the war of 1870 the Emperor of the Germans. It was the triumph of a subtle diplomacy, motived by one dominating passion—personal ambition. There were some who, in their enthusiasm for Bulgaria, found in Ferdinand the chivalrous hero who had wrought the miracle. The success of his policy prejudiced their judgment of the man. But if we are to understand Ferdinand we must distinguish between public results and private motives. It may be that no other instrument could have

accomplished what this purely artificial monarch had accomplished for Bulgaria. The determination to "arrive" himself had enabled Bulgaria to arrive also. Between him and his people there is an immeasurable gulf fixed. A solid, somewhat dour, but very virile race, the Bulgarians have no point of contact in temperament or sympathies with their sovereign. He has had to conquer them, as he had to conquer the Powers and Stambuloff. They, a simple, undemonstrative people, were revolted by the vanity of their prince. While his neighbor, Nicholas of Montenegro, sat at his door and was accessible to any peasant, Ferdinand assumed the pose and habits of the grand monarque. Within a few days of his arrival he had refused to see the representatives of England, Austria, and Italy because they did not appear in the presence in uniform. No king in Europe is hedged round with more pomp and ceremony than Ferdinand, travels in more regal style, assumes a more Olympian air, cultivates so extravagant an etiquette. Even his little son cannot ride abroad without a cavalcade and an ecclesiastical dignity in attendance. His relative, the Comtesse de Paris, once said of him that he cared for nothing except titles and orders, and the industry with which for years he canvassed the Courts of Europe for a crown gives color to the saying.

But vain though he is, his ambition soars beyond titles. Like Charles the First, he will be "a king indeed," and not a mockery of a king. He will stoop low to conquer, it is true. Neither his faith, nor his dignity, nor loyalty to those who have served him will stand in the way of his march to power. When he found that Russia remained obdurate, even though Stambuloff had been removed, he bartered his faith and his word to win her smiles. He himself is a Roman Catholic, and when he married his first wife, Princess Marie Louise of Parma, he agreed that their children should be brought up in the faith of Rome. But when all else had failed to placate Russia, he had his son Boris "converted" to the Orthodox Church, in spite of the scorn of the world and the flight of his wife with her younger son to escape the outrage to her faith. "The West has pronounced its anathema against me," he said, but he had won his prize. Russia smiled on him, recognised him, and with that recognition came the countenance of all the Great Powers. The path to glory was at last clear.

But it was in the Stambuloff episode that his character was most startlingly revealed. It is a dark story. History could not show a more dramatic contrast of personalities than that provided by Ferdinand and the Minister who made him prince—the one all artifice, the other all primitive nature. Stambuloff was a ruthless man set in ruthless circumstances. He had one passion—love of his country. To that passion he sacrificed everything and everybody—most of all he sacrificed himself. Turkey had been driven out of his vineyard; but the agents of Russia were overrunning it. He was alone in the midst of a web of plots and intrigues, and he fought like a giant, mercilessly, cunningly. Meanwhile he was consolidating the country, constructing railways, developing its

resources, giving it education, building up its army, laying the foundations of that power that was to win the respect of the world later. To him Ferdinand was only a necessary instrument in his scheme to defeat the machinations of Russia and to establish the freedom of his land. And he found him, instead, anxious only to be approved by Russia and the Powers. The liberty of Ferdinand's kingdom was threatened; his very life was in daily peril; he lived on the brink of a volcano, and yet his dreams were the dreams of pomp and vanity. Two such men could not run permanently in harness. One may sympathise with the prince, for Stambuloff was "gey ill to live wi?" He had no reverence for princes and a mighty scorn for the shows of things. He was fighting a tremendous battle, and was apt to forget his manners. "I cannot and will not be seen with you if you don't take that frippery off," he is said to have exclaimed when, his mind full of fierce actualities, he found himself in the presence of his prince, who was clothed in a wonderful coronation mantle of purple and ermine. "Some people will think you are mad. There are more urgent matters to be attended to than coronation mantles. For instance, your Highness might see that you get a more trustworthy bodyguard, or else—"

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But if the minister would not betray the prince, the prince could desert the minister. One day, during his absence abroad, Ferdinand wrote an official letter forbidding Stambuloff to report to him, and declaring that his conduct was "infame." Stambuloff resigned in a letter in which he said, "cela ne fait honneur ni au peuple bulgare, ni au son Prince,



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si l'activite d'un ministre bulgare doit etre caracterisee par l'adjectif 'infame.'

Ferdinand was free. "Henceforth," he said, "I mean to rule as well as to reign." He has kept his word. But while Stambuloff lived the shadow of that terrible man hung over his path. It was said that he was to be brought to trial. It would have been well if he had been. There were plenty of crimes against him, for he had dipped his hands deep in the blood of those enemies whom he believed to be the enemies of his country. But he was not tried. Instead, his house was surrounded by spies; his steps were dogged wherever he went. He appealed to be allowed to go to Karlsbad for his health, but the request was refused by the Government. He then declared publicly that he was being kept in Sofia to be murdered. On the 15th July, 1895, in the streets of Sofia, with the police looking on, he was brutally butchered—not merely murdered, but mutilated. Prince Ferdinand, who had gone to Karlsbad, telegraphed his grief to the widow and ordered his highest Court official to tender his condolences to her personally. The telegram was unanswered; the official was refused admission. Europe rang with the murder. Petkoff, who narrowly escaped death with his friend, denounced the Prince; the *Svoboda* openly accused him and his Ministers of instigating the murder; the *Vossische Zeitung* said that "if any ordinary citizen of any State had been so incriminated as Prince Ferdinand had been, the man would have been arrested." No one was arrested; no one was punished.

It will be seen that those who dismiss King Ferdinand as a mere scented popinjay are mistaken. To have come a stranger into a land seething with rebellion—a land where he was to have been a prince in name and a mere instrument of policy in fact—to have matched himself against the Bulgarian Bismarck and overthrown him, to have won his crown and made himself "a King indeed," as despotic as any King in Europe, to stand at the end of twenty-five years at the head of an army that had astonished the world and at the head of a League that confronted Europe with a new political fact of the first magnitude—all this implies more than the vanity and the febrile futility with which his enemies credit him. He is "the artful Augustus" of a later Gibbon, a Napoleon the Third with more than Napoleon's calculation and statesmanship. "I am the rock against which the waves beat in vain," he said grandiloquently long ago—and his courtiers laughed. He is not that. But he is the supple artificer of greatness, innocent of scruple, swift to take fortune at the flood, one who "makes nice of no vile hold to stay him up," and has that wonderful instinct of self-preservation which enables him in all emergencies to fall lightly upon his feet. He applies the arts of the mediæval prince to Twentieth-Century conditions and Machiavelli himself would have little to teach him.

Now it would be unfair to suggest that all the responsibility for the course of events that left Bulgaria outside the orbit of the Allies, when the second war began, rested on King Ferdinand. It was shared by others, by

Serbia, by Russia to some extent, by the Bulgarian people themselves, certainly by M. Daneff, who, always with Bismarck and his methods in mind, aimed at a Bulgarian dominion in the Balkans. Indeed, if we penetrate to the ultimate sources of things, Great Britain is perhaps as responsible as any. For it is not mere ingenuity that sees in the war that is devastating Europe to-day the outcome of the Berlin Treaty with which Disraeli wrought the wrong and dazzled his countrymen. With that sympathy for the Turk which is universally characteristic of the Jew, he became his saviour in Europe, destroyed the Treaty of San Stefano, and handed Macedonia back to be ground under his heel. Bismarck, watching events with his grim humor, saw that all was well. He was not going to be involved in the quarrel with Russia, for friendship with Russia was the unchanging key of his policy, and he declared that the Balkans were "not worth the bones of a single Pomeranian grenadier." But if he was not going to get into trouble with Russia himself he was quite happy to see Russia in trouble with others, and when Austria, anxious to protect her own interests in the Balkans, wanted to intervene in the war he astutely opposed the idea. He was right. A new abscess was formed in the Balkans. The war of 1877—or rather the crime that followed the war—was the seed of the Balkan war of 1912, and the wars of 1912 begot in large measure the European war of to-day.

If many shoulders share the responsibility

for the detachment of Bulgaria from its natural alliance with the Allies to-day, the main personal responsibility rests on King Ferdinand. He had risen from a wandering princeling to a monarch. He had in 1912 emerged from one of the most successful wars in history, and his dream of a Balkan Empire, with himself as the Tsar of the Empire, seemed within reach. The genius of Venizelos had given reality and statesmanship to the Balkanic federation: Ferdinand would convert that federation into a dominion under his own sway. In pursuing this entirely personal aim he appealed unfortunately to the sentiment of his people. They are in many respects one of the most reputable peoples in Europe—honest, industrious, capable. But their success since they had thrown off the yoke of the Turk had filled them with ambitions. They believed themselves to be the master people of the Balkans, and their leaders had cultivated the dream of a four-seas hegemony, a Bulgarian dominion extending to the shores of the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmora, the Aegean, and the Adriatic.

It was unfortunate that at the crisis of the war with Turkey, when the Balkan League was in peril, Bulgaria was represented at the conference in London and subsequently by M. Daneff rather than by the statesman-like M. Gueshoff, as M. Venizelos understood would be the case. Why the change was made I do not know, but it had fatal consequences. M. Daneff is of the Prussian type of diplomatist. He believes in "hacking his



FERDINAND, KING OF ROUMANIA.